

Testimony of
Russell B. Laine

May 23, 2007

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE
TESTIMONY

Statement of Russell B. Laine

Second Vice President

International Association of Chiefs of Police

Before the Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime and Drugs

United States Senate

May 23, 2007

515 N. WASHINGTON STREET

ALEXANDRIA, VA 22314

703-836-6767

WWW.THEIACP.ORG

Good Morning Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, My name is Russell Laine and I serve as the Chief of Police in Algonquin, Illinois. For those of you unfamiliar with the area, Algonquin is a community of approximately 33,000 located about 40 miles northwest of Chicago.

I am here today as the Vice President of the International Association of Chiefs of Police representing over 20,000 law enforcement executives throughout the world.

I am pleased to be here this morning to discuss the challenges currently confronting the U.S. law enforcement community and our need for an increased level of support from the Federal government.

In the United States, there are more than 18,000 law enforcement agencies and well over 700,000 officers who patrol our state highways and the streets of our communities each and every day.

During the past 15 years, these officers, and the law enforcement agencies they serve, have made tremendous strides in reducing the level of crime and violence in our communities. This has been accomplished in part because these officers have an intimate knowledge of their communities and because they have developed close relationships with the citizens they serve.

Yet, despite the best efforts of our nation's law enforcement officers, the disturbing truth is that each year in the United States, well over a million of our fellow citizens are victims of violent crime. Unfortunately, in the last two years we have seen a steady increase in the rate of violent crime in the United States. According to the FBI Uniform Crime Report, Violent Crime rose at a rate of 2.5 percent during 2005. To put that in perspective, that is an additional 31,479 victims.

Unfortunately, this increase in the crime rate appears to be accelerating. For the first six months of 2006, the crime rate rose at a rate of 3.7 percent, when compared to the same time frame in 2005. If this rate holds for the final six months, and I am sorry to say that I believe it will, it would mean that an additional 47,000 Americans will find themselves victims of violent crime.

While there are many different theories as to why violent crime is increasing in these communities, after years of often double-digit declines, there is one fact that we all can agree on: no one is immune from crime. What were once considered "urban" problems--drug addiction and distribution, violent crime, gangs, and poverty--have migrated to suburban and even rural locations. Gangs, Guns & Drugs are everywhere!!

In many ways, my hometown of Algonquin typifies the problems that are plaguing many American communities. Traditionally, the Algonquin PD has not had to deal with the same level of crime and violence that has confronted larger communities and cities. For example, nearly twenty-two years ago when I arrived in Algonquin the pressing issues facing the department were dealing with curfew violations; parking issues and stray cows and horses that wandered onto main thoroughfare.

Today, that thoroughfare is an eight lane highway, and the Algonquin Police Department is dealing with more dangerous criminals who are committing increasingly violent crimes. For example, Algonquin just experienced a rather infamous first in the history of our community: our first drive by shooting. If you would allow me, I would like to read from an analysis of this event that was prepared by one of my Sergeants.

"Eight bullet holes were found in the front of the residence and eight cartridge casings were recovered from the street in front of the residence. This same residence was the scene of a firebombing in January of 2006 and is the home of an 18 year old male who is a self admitted member of the Latin Kings street gang who claims to be "retired" from the gang and no longer involved in gang activity. Earlier that same evening there were shootings at the residences of members of the Sureno 13 street gang.

In communities near Algonquin there has been, and continues to be, an ongoing war between the Latin Kings and the Sureno 13s street gangs for general supremacy and control of drug distribution in the area. These two gangs are well organized and are openly hostile towards each other and have been actively shooting at each other for some time".

In years past "gang activity" within Algonquin could be accurately described as local youth wannabes who thought they were acting cool and seeking an identity for themselves and the random contacts with hard core gang members from other towns who were merely passing through Algonquin going from one place to another. Today there is an active gang presence within Algonquin and the attendant violence is increasing both in frequency and intensity.

I think it is safe to say that this report pretty much demonstrates that the days of worrying about stray cows are over.

And it is not just gang-related and other violent crimes that are on the increase. We are witnessing a rise in property crimes and like, many communities around the country, a new wave of financial and identity crimes.

Another example of this chilling trend in the mid-west is a new drug called "cheez," a mix of black heroin and Tylenol PM. It is mostly sold to minors and becoming a trend in schools.

As you can imagine, responding to and investigating all of these crimes is labor intensive and a time consuming process.

Unfortunately, our ability to do this is becoming increasingly strained. To be blunt, our resources are stretched to the limit. As a result, we have not been able to add the additional officers that would allow us to combat these criminals aggressively. We have not been able to take advantage of necessary training that would leave our officers better prepared to confront the new breed of criminals operating in our community. And we have not been able to acquire the sophisticated technology to help us in our crime fighting and which is available to the "bad guys".

It is telling that this increase in violent crime, drug sales and gang activity in America, corresponds directly to the substantial decline in funding for state, tribal and local law enforcement from federal government assistance programs.

I will not use my time here this morning to enter into a prolonged discussion of the current budget situation confronting law enforcement but I would ask that I be able to submit a copy of the IACP's Budget Analysis for the record.

I do believe it is important to note that when compared to the FY 2002 funding level of \$3.8 billion, the Administration's FY 2008 proposal represents a reduction of more than \$3.2 billion or 85 percent and, unfortunately, no program has been hit harder over the last several years than the COPS Program.

These cuts are particularly troubling because the IACP believes that the COPS Program played an integral role in our ability to reduce crime rates in the past. By providing law enforcement agencies with the necessary resources, training and assistance, the COPS Program has become an invaluable ally to state, tribal and local law enforcement agencies. It is this fact that makes the current situation completely unacceptable, not only to the nation's entire law enforcement community, but also to the citizens we (you and I) are sworn to protect from both crime and terrorism. It is an undisputed reality: state, tribal, and local law enforcement agencies are on the front line of effective terrorism prevention. Because of their 24/7, 365 days a year efforts to prevent and combat crime and violence, state, tribal, and local law enforcement officers are uniquely situated to detect, investigate, apprehend and hopefully prevent suspected terrorists from acting.

We willingly accept the new responsibilities in combating terrorism, but our ability to continue with traditional policing is our best weapon against terrorism. For this we need your assistance.

State, tribal and local law enforcement are doing all that we can to protect our communities from increasing crime rates and the specter of terrorism, but we cannot do it alone. We need the full

support and assistance of the federal government. That is why programs like the COPS program and the Byrne-JAG program have been so successful and so popular, with the state and local law enforcement community. And that is why it is so essential for these programs to be fully funded in FY 2008 and the years that follow.

Unfortunately, as the IACP Budget Analysis makes clear, the reductions these critical programs have suffered in recent years and the cuts contained in the proposed FY 2008 budget have the potential certainty to cripple the capabilities of law enforcement agencies nationwide and force many departments to take officers off the streets, eliminate the promise of vital communications between agencies during a major public safety emergency or natural disaster--all leading to more crime and violence in our hometowns and, ultimately, less security for our homeland.

Thank you.